

Chateau Montelena The Story of St. Vincent

Winemaker's Notes

During January, St. Vincent of Saragossa, the patron saint of winegrowers, is honored throughout Europe with celebrations, prayers, weather-omen ceremonials, and, of course, wine tasting.

St. Vincent of Saragossa died in the year 304, martyred during the last great persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperors Maximian and Diocletian. By early medieval times, St. Vincent had been adopted as a patron saint by vineyard workers and winemakers in Europe – perhaps they identified their struggles against drought, mildew, frost, insects and all of the other tribulations of wine growing with the legendary tortures suffered by St. Vincent. The many “St. Vincent” place-names in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal bear enduring witness to the widespread devotion to the saint in the Middle Ages. He is patron of Lisbon, Valencia, Saragossa, Chalone, Saone, Bern, Magdaburg, Milan and many, many small villages and hamlets in Europe. Scenes from his life are found in the stained glass windows of numerous churches, notably the cathedrals of Chartres and Bourges and the Church of St. Vincent at Rouen in France.

As devotion to St. Vincent spread, new legends sprang up to seal the identity of the saint with the particular locality. One of the most charming and well-known of these legends arose at La Mission, one of the great wineries of Bordeaux: St. Vincent, saddened by the lack of good wine in heaven, was sent by God to visit the vineyards of France. He was so cordially welcomed by the monks at La Mission and he so greatly enjoyed their wines that he forgot how to return to heaven. God, in a moment of anger, turned him into stone. And that is why (so the legend goes) that to this very day an old stone statue of St. Vincent stands at La Mission.

In the Montelena Estate Vineyard stands a shrine to St. Vincent with a bronze plaque that reads: “St. Vincent, Bless this vineyard and all who labor here.” From our Estate vineyards we produce a unique red wine in his honor – a blend of Zinfandel, Primitivo and Sangiovese.

Excerpts from an article by Judy Barrett

